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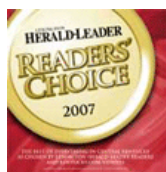
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Chicken processor to build Marion County plant

By Janet Patton
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The state has given final approval to \$7.5 million in tax credits for a Marion County chicken processing plant that could bring more than 250 new jobs.

The Economic Development Cabinet announced Tuesday that Rancho Poultry, a joint venture between two McDonald's suppliers, plans to build a \$43 million, 100,000-square-foot plant in Lebanon.

The Kentucky Economic Development Finance Authority gave preliminary approval for the tax credit two months ago.

Sanchez-Keystone Foods, which will operate the plant as Rancho Poultry, is a partnership between Keystone Foods of Pennsylvania and Lopez Foods in Oklahoma, said Tom Lund, executive director of the Lebanon/Marion County Industrial Foundation.

Lopez Foods is also a major supplier of meat products for Wal-Mart.

According to KEDFA, the jobs will have an estimated average hourly wage of \$12.68.

The plant, on 25 acres, will have at least two processing lines that will season and cook up to 60 million pounds of chicken annually.

The chicken will be shipped in from slaughter facilities in Albany, Lund said.

He said construction is expected to begin soon and take about 18 months.

Lund said he hopes the plant will be a first step toward more agricultural processing, for which the industrial park was intended.

"Salsa was what we were shooting for, so we're hoping this will build more infrastructure," Lund said.

Marion County Judge-Executive John Mattingly said the announcement is good news for the community, which has many manufacturing jobs related to the automotive industry.

"We really, really wanted this plant because it will diversify our economy," he said.

According to the state, current unemployment in the county is at 5.7 percent, below the state average of 5.9 percent.

The announcement comes at a time of contraction for the poultry industry. Tyson, Pilgrim's Pride and Smithfield Foods have all shed meat processing plants in the last year.



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